



### **Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement**

The guiding Vision for Gila County is to preserve, maintain, enhance and encourage a high quality natural, living and working environment for its residents. This Vision will be accomplished through the orderly development of the limited private property base, the protection and expansion of its economy and the conservation of the County's cultural, social and economic heritage.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.A PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Gila County Comprehensive Plan is to provide for the health, safety and general welfare of the citizens of Gila County through the adoption of a plan that outlines a program for the organized use of land within the unincorporated portions of the county. The comprehensive plan articulates how the citizens in Gila County prefer development to occur, and is a tool to be utilized by county decision-makers, staff and citizens. The comprehensive plan serves as the foundation for the various other planning documents and ordinances that help to implement the plan, such as specific area plans, the Gila County Zoning Ordinance, the Gila County Subdivision Ordinance and others.

Gila County is a county of great diversity and history. Extending from the Gila River in the Sonoran Desert to the pine forests of the Mogollon Rim, the county offers a full range of opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Convenient access to the Phoenix and Tucson metropolitan areas and spectacular landscapes and natural resources make Gila County a primary destination for visitors and a hospitable home for permanent and seasonal residents. The Gila County Comprehensive Plan is intended to help maintain and enhance those opportunities and qualities which attract people, and to assist the county to realize its potential through logical and planned decision making.



### 1.B WHAT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

As the population of Gila County increases over time, land will be developed as residences, shopping centers, businesses, industrial areas, schools and so on. Roads, infrastructure and public services, such as public safety, administration and solid waste facilities, will be needed to serve these areas. The Gila County Comprehensive Plan is a document that identifies, in a general sense, the location, type, intensity and character of future land uses throughout the unincorporated areas of Gila County, along with the accompanying transportation infrastructure and public facilities. In a sense, the comprehensive plan is like a “blueprint” for the future growth and development of land in the county. It is prepared to ensure that physical development is coordinated in accordance with the present and future needs and the desires of Gila County residents.

Citizen input has been emphasized during preparation of the comprehensive plan. The future land use pattern, vision, goals and policies in the comprehensive plan are based on the desires, ideals and needs of the citizens of Gila County. Indeed, the comprehensive plan is the citizens’ expression, or vision, of Gila County in the future. Adherence to the vision, goals, objectives and policies in the plan will help shape the physical development of the county to a pattern desired by its citizens. Plan preparation is the result of an open, public process designed to encourage as much public input as possible. Ultimately, the citizens’ elected representatives – the Gila County Board of Supervisors, adopt the comprehensive plan.

Subsequent to adoption, the comprehensive plan is a tool, which is used to assist and guide county officials, policy makers, staff, property owners, developers and citizens in decisions related to the growth and development of Gila County. It is the primary policy document that provides guidance for decisions related to future land use, transportation and public facility issues. Examples of growth and development decisions affected by the comprehensive plan include evaluations of requests to rezone property, siting analyses for future public facilities and requests for dedication of public roadway rights-of-way.

The comprehensive plan is based on a time horizon of 10 years as outlined by State Statutes. It is a long-range, visionary document that, if followed over time, will assist in the organized development of the county’s private lands. As a result, the comprehensive plan should not be viewed as a short-term program but rather a long-term process. The success of the plan should be measured over an extended period of time, allowing adequate opportunity for its use and implementation.

While the comprehensive plan is intended to be utilized as a tool to help guide the decision making process, it is a flexible document that can be amended as necessary to respond to changing conditions, opportunities and challenges. For example, the comprehensive plan may be amended because public values and priorities related to growth and development may change over time, or new proposals are made for better developments or more appropriate



uses never contemplated in the original comprehensive plan. Occasional amendments to a comprehensive plan are not uncommon and occur through a public process. Amendments can be initiated by the county, property owners, developers, residents and other interested parties.



### 1.C LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) require all county governments, including Gila County, to plan for future growth through the preparation, adoption and maintenance of a comprehensive plan for the unincorporated areas of the county. ARS 11-802 states “The board of supervisors of a county, .... shall plan and provide for the future growth and improvement of its area of jurisdiction, and coordinate all public improvements in accordance therewith....” The statutes establish that “[t]he county plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the area of jurisdiction” (ARS 11-821.A). ARS 11-806.B states that “[t]he purpose of the plan is to bring about coordinated physical development in accordance with the present and future needs of the county. The comprehensive plan shall be developed so as to conserve the natural resources of the county, to insure efficient expenditure of public funds, and to promote the health, safety, convenience, and general welfare of the public.”

The statutes do not dictate, however, what a comprehensive plan should say about the use, location, intensity or type of future growth and development desired by county residents. That is to be determined by the citizens of each county during the process to prepare the comprehensive plan. Indeed, Arizona law requires “effective, early and continuous public participation in the development and major amendment of comprehensive plans.” (ARS 11-806.D). This is to ensure that comprehensive plans are based on the desires of the residents of each county.

The elected and appointed officials and staff of Gila County recognize the importance of establishing a harmonious relationship between government and property owners based upon a mutual understanding of vision and purpose. The Gila County Comprehensive Plan is designed to respect private property rights while enhancing, increasing and enriching the individual freedoms, opportunities and investments of all of Gila County’s citizens.

### 1.D APPLICATION OF GENERAL PLAN AND EXCEPTIONS

As required by Arizona statutes, the Gila County Comprehensive Plan shall apply to all private properties within the unincorporated areas of Gila County. However, pursuant to ARS 11-830A.2, nothing in the Gila County Comprehensive Plan shall prevent, restrict, or otherwise regulate the use or occupation of land or improvements for railroad, mining, metallurgical, grazing or general agricultural purposes, if the tract concerned is five or more contiguous commercial acres. Although the county does not have land use jurisdiction over legally recognized Indian Reservations or federal lands, the comprehensive plan seeks to protect the integrity of the federal land holdings and provides guidance and direction to federal lands that are transferred into private ownership, subject to the exception indicated above.



### 1.E PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

The comprehensive plan is a document that belongs to all citizens of Gila County. The vision, goals, objectives and policies in the plan are the result of an extensive public outreach process that involved many citizens, property owners, government agencies and interested parties. As required by Arizona statute (ARS 11-806), a public participation plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors at the beginning of the planning process.

The public participation plan established the public outreach and involvement program for the process to prepare the comprehensive plan. The various public outreach efforts included: public information and input meetings; creation of a Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of county residents, business owners, agency representatives, representatives from incorporated cities and towns in Gila County and county planning staff; coordination with incorporated towns and cities in the county and the Arizona State Land Department; use of print media, the internet, local radio and news media; the posting and placement of information within local communities throughout the county; and the formal public hearing process as required by Arizona statutes. Significant time and effort was expended to encourage the participation of all interested parties. This comprehensive plan is the product of that participation and input.

### 1.F ORGANIZATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Gila County Comprehensive Plan includes the following chapters as outlined below:

- **Introduction (Chapter 1):** This chapter provides information regarding the contents of the comprehensive plan, purpose, legal status, public participation process and a brief overview of the history and physical setting of Gila County.
- **Comprehensive Plan Elements (Chapters 2-4):** The Gila County Comprehensive Plan includes three primary elements: land use (chapter 2), transportation (chapter 3) and public facilities (chapter 4). Each element describes the vision, goals and objectives desired for the future by the citizens of Gila County and the policies that will be used by the county government to bring the visions and goals to fruition. The plan elements describe the land use categories of the county, the transportation standards and the public facilities expectations. Each element also contains an implementation matrix that outlines the tasks that need to be accomplished by Gila County to implement the comprehensive plan elements. The tasks in the implementation program consist of both long and short-term work items.
- **Administration (Chapter 5):** This chapter describes the processes used to administer the comprehensive plan, including criteria for interpretation, periodic reviews and amendments.



### 1.G INTENDED USE OF THE PLAN

The comprehensive plan is intended to serve as a guide for decisions by county planning staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. It is a document that is intended to provide guidance for all citizens in the county and other interested parties. The plan identifies generalized land uses, development densities and intensities based on the desired vision of the future expressed by the citizens of Gila County. In addition to the goals, objectives and policies in the plan, there are **Land Use** and **Circulation** maps and descriptive text that further identify and define the intended application of the ideas and concepts in the plan. The comprehensive plan is not, however, intended to take the place of zoning nor is it intended to modify pre-existing land uses, entitlements or statutory rights.

The comprehensive plan is advisory in nature and is designed to be flexible and accommodating when a use is deemed to be appropriate by the Board of Supervisors. The plan should be utilized as a tool to assist decision makers through the identification of appropriate land use and land use relationships, and not be viewed as a tool by which to stop new development that is compatible with the goals, objectives and policies in the plan.

Due to the generalized nature and long-term vision of the comprehensive plan, the plan cannot cover all potential development-related circumstances. In these instances, the comprehensive plan should be viewed as providing guidance to assist in making decisions that are based on individual circumstances. As such, no one portion of the plan should be seen as the final answer when reviewing future development proposals.



### 1.H PHYSICAL SETTING – OVERVIEW

Gila County, named after the presence of the Gila River, consists of approximately 4,769 square miles of land located in east-central Arizona. The county contains varied topographic and geologic conditions that have influenced its development and economy from the time of its initial settlement. Mountainous terrain and the heavily timbered Mogollon Rim dominate the northern and eastern portions of the county while the upper Sonoran Desert dominates the southern and western reaches of the county. The Gila, Salt and East Verde Rivers, all of which are considered major surface water tributaries, help to define the county into various physical, political and resource management areas. Figure 1, *Regional Location*, highlights the major cities, towns, transportation corridors and physical features of the county.

Gila County contains the incorporated cities and towns of Miami, Globe, Hayden, Winkelman, and Payson, as well as a number of other unincorporated rural communities including Young, Tonto Basin, Gisela, Christopher Creek, Pine and Strawberry. Globe is the county seat and the second largest urban population center (7,486 persons<sup>1</sup>) after Payson (13,620 persons<sup>1</sup>) in Gila County.

Due to its varied physiographic features and the existing development pattern, Gila County can be divided into geographic regions, each having a unique identity and history based upon its regional characteristics. The southern Gila County region, which roughly extends south from Globe and Miami to the Hayden/Winkelman area, has an economy and culture rooted in the copper mining industry. The eastern region, which comprises portions of the San Carlos and Fort Apache Indian Reservations, falls outside of the land use and regulatory jurisdiction of Gila County, and contains the San Carlos Apache Gold Casino and Globe-San Carlos Airport. The central Gila County region, which includes Tonto Basin, has seen solid growth anchored by its easy access and proximity to the Phoenix metropolitan area, the availability of private land and proximity to Lake Roosevelt. The northeastern portion of Gila County, which contains the community of Young, is surrounded by public lands and has no improved access or public infrastructure in place.

The northern Gila County region, which includes the communities of Payson, Pine and Strawberry, has witnessed a recent surge in population as local economies have shifted from the mining and timber industries to service and recreation-oriented industries in response to growing populations both within the county and the Phoenix area. Proximity to the Phoenix area (population 3.5 million), improvements to major highway corridors, multiple recreational opportunities afforded by the Tonto National Forest and a temperate climate have promoted accessibility and the overall attractiveness of the northern region for residents as well as a destination for both seasonal and weekend visitors.

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<sup>1</sup> Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, US Census, 2000.



## FIGURE 1 REGIONAL LOCATION